

Committee <b>General Purposes Committee</b>	Date <b>3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012</b>	Classification <b>Unrestricted</b>	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Report of: <b>Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)</b>  Originating Officer(s): <b>John Williams, Service Head, Democratic Services</b>		Title: <b>Local Electoral Review 2012 - update</b>  Ward(s) affected: <b>All</b>		

## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Committee is aware that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is currently undertaking an electoral review of Tower Hamlets. The aim of the review is to establish the most suitable number of councillors for the authority; and within this to propose the number and boundaries of wards to deliver:-
- electoral equality for voters;
  - boundaries that reflect natural communities; and
  - effective and convenient local government
- 1.2 The recommendations agreed as a result of the electoral review will be implemented with effect from the next local elections in May 2014.
- 1.3 This report provides an update on progress of the review for the Committee's information.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the information in the report be noted.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body established by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. The LGBCE are responsible for reviewing local authority electoral arrangements, administrative boundaries and structure.
- 3.2 Tower Hamlets has been identified as requiring an electoral review in the current year in accordance with the Commission's criteria relating to electoral variances between wards. Since the last review in 1998/9, the levels of electoral representation in the borough have become unbalanced. Currently the number of electors represented by the councillors in six of the 17 wards

varies by more than 10% from the borough average and the councillors in Millwall ward represent 42% more electors than the average.

- 3.3 The review commenced on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2011 when representatives of the LGBCE addressed the Mayor and Councillors prior to the full Council meeting.

#### **4. THE REVIEW PROCESS**

- 4.1 A local electoral review is conducted in two main stages. At the first stage the Commission makes an initial determination on the future size of the council – i.e. the total number of councillors required to deliver effective and convenient local government in the borough. This initial finding determines the duration of the review and the extent of consultation to be undertaken. If a significant change in council size is proposed (i.e. a change of more than one or two councillors), a further period of public consultation is held on this question.
- 4.2 The second stage of the review focuses on the proposed division of the borough into wards, to achieve within the total number of councillors proposed, the optimum number of electors per councillor across all wards of the authority. Submissions on warding patterns are sought from the Mayor and Councillors, political parties, the public, residents associations and community groups before the LGBCE publish their draft recommendations.

#### **5. PROGRESS ON THE TOWER HAMLETS REVIEW**

##### **Council Size**

- 5.1 The 'Council Size' stage of the Tower Hamlets review is now complete. An initial phase of consultation closed on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2012, during which the LGBCE received a total of six submissions making various proposals for a council size of between 38 and 51 councillors. LGBCE officers subsequently visited Tower Hamlets and met with the respective group leaders and other members to clarify any points of uncertainty in relation to the submissions.
- 5.2 On 13<sup>th</sup> March the Commission decided to undertake a public consultation on a council size for Tower Hamlets of 45 Councillors. This consultation was scheduled to run from 27<sup>th</sup> March to 8<sup>th</sup> May 2012 but in response to representations from the Council and others (particularly because of the elections on 3<sup>rd</sup> May), the Commission agreed to accept responses until 11<sup>th</sup> May.
- 5.3 During the public consultation on council size the Commission received 23 responses. These are available to view on the LGBCE website. On 13<sup>th</sup> June, having considered those responses, the Commission confirmed that it is minded to propose a council size of **45 councillors**, which it considers would take account of the new executive arrangements while not having a detrimental effect on elected members' ability effectively to scrutinise the decisions of the authority or represent their constituents. The Commission has therefore commenced the next stage of the review on that basis.

### **Warding patterns**

- 5.4 The next stage of the review is a further public consultation, to run from 20<sup>th</sup> June to 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012. During this stage, the Commission invites local people and other interested parties including councillors, local political and community groups to submit information for a new pattern of wards – i.e. proposals as to where the new ward boundaries should be placed - based on a council size of 45 members.
- 5.5 The Commission will publicise the consultation via their website and in the media. Copies of a media release and publicity poster are attached to this report.
- 5.6 The Commission state that they aim to recommend a pattern of wards that achieves good electoral equality, reflects community identity and interests and provides for effective and convenient local government. They will also seek to use strong, easily identifiable boundaries.
- 5.7 To this end the Commission needs a good understanding of community identity in Tower Hamlets and invites consultation responses to address this. The Commission is particularly keen to understand which areas communities identify with, how and why they do so. They are interested in all relevant information, for example economic or demographic data and mapping; community usage mapping; local place surveys and partner/stakeholder details.
- 5.8 All proposals for warding patterns should demonstrate how the proposal aids the provision of effective and convenient local government and why any deterioration in equality of representation or community identity should be accepted. Representations that are supported by evidence and argument will carry more weight than mere assertions. There is no requirement for the new warding arrangements to be based on a uniform pattern of three member wards.
- 5.9 A detailed guidance document, 'Electoral reviews: Technical guidance' is available on the Commission's website at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk). The Commission intends to publish projected electorate figures for the borough to assist local people and organisations in formulating their submissions.
- 5.10 Although warding proposals are being invited on the basis of a council size of 45 councillors, the Commission reserves the right to adjust this slightly (normally by no more than 1 councillor plus or minus) if this appears necessary to provide for ward patterns that better reflect electoral equality and community identity.

### **Timetable for the remaining stages**

- 5.11 Following the close of consultation on warding patterns on 28<sup>th</sup> August, the Commission will take a provisional decision on warding arrangements and will

share this with the Council. It is intended that draft recommendations for Tower Hamlets will be published in **November 2012**.

- 5.12 There will then be a further eight week period of consultation on the draft recommendations before final recommendations are published in **March 2013**.

## **6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

## **7. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)**

- 7.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

## **8. IMPLICATIONS FOR ONE TOWER HAMLETS**

- 8.1 The aim of the electoral review is to secure appropriate and as far as possible equal representation for electors across all wards of the borough.

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### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)**

#### **LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT**

Brief description of "background paper"

Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection

Correspondence from LGBCE

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